

We must restore America's credibility and engage with other nations. The ability to build and sustain international coalitions and alliances will continue to be one of the central requirements of national security policy. After eight years of predominately unilateral behavior, the United States must refocus on working with our allies, as the full range of threats to our national security can only be addressed through consistent and determined multilateral efforts.

In the executive branch, we are already witnessing a shift, with parts of the Department of Defense focusing on developing doctrine and organizational mechanisms for improving coalition operations. However, the U.S. can only lead and help reinvigorate international institutions if other nations believe we are credible and intend our efforts to serve interests beyond our own. Thus, we must rebuild the credibility and reputation of the United States and Congress can play a role by authorizing and funding appropriate programs which provide both civilian and military aid to our allies which are presented in a manner which does not appear merely transactional.

In addition, we must refocus our efforts on Afghanistan and Pakistan. From the beginning, I believed that the war in Iraq was a tragic misadventure. We diverted our attention from Afghanistan, the home base for the al-Qaeda that attacked us on September 11, 2001, and now we are still struggling to defeat the Taliban and bring stability to that region. In addition, we committed so much of our resources to the conflict in Iraq that our Army can no longer meet its requirements to execute other operations, such as defending the 28,000 American troops in South Korea. Still, we could not immediately pull out of Iraq. Withdraw is the most dangerous of military operations and doing it safely takes 15-24 months. During this time, we must put pressure on the Iraqi government to take responsibility for its own country's security, using its surplus, as we methodically decrease our involvement and transfer manpower and other resources to Afghanistan.

President Obama has taken the correct approach to our most pressing national security issue: the “safe haven” that al-Qaeda has found on the porous border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the threat the Taliban and al-Qaeda pose to Pakistan’s stability. Our military is not able to operate there without inflaming passions to a breaking point. We must, therefore, get Pakistan to stop viewing India as its number one threat, rather than the Taliban/al-Qaeda insurgency it has. Ironically, with the Taliban approaching Islamabad, this may be the necessary “leverage” to force the Pakistani leadership – divided among the military, intelligence service, and civilian elected officials – to come together and refocus their military on counterinsurgency training and use the resources necessary to stop this insurgency. Meanwhile, we must support this nation with development assistance in the tribal regions. This is ultimately, as we blunt the insurgency, a battle for “hearts and minds.” Meanwhile, we cannot permit Afghanistan to slip any further because it cannot become a base again for the one third of the Taliban that have become “al-Qaeda-ized.” It is not our principle focus; Pakistan is. But it could become our principle focus again if we don’t secure it.